

THE
HONOURABLE
MR JUSTICE ROUTHIER

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

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THE HONORABLE MR JUSTICE ROUTHIER (1)

The Honorable Mr Adolphe Basile Routhier rests his claim to a prominent place in Canada, not only on his eminence as a Judge of the Supérieur Court of the Province of Quebec, but on his well earned fame as a brilliant writer, a poet and a powerful speaker.

He was born at St Placide, in the county of Two Mountains, near Montreal, on the 8th may 1839 ; and his ancestors came from Saintonge, France. Educated in the classics of the college of St Therese, in the county of Terrebonne, young Routhier was the first graduate of that institution to receive

(1) N. B. This biography is far from being complete, and is only composed of extracts from various english and french publications.

the degree of B. A. from Laval University, Quebec, at which he also studied law. Called to the bar in December 1861, he settled down to the practice of his profession at Kamouraska, P. Q. and soon won success and distinction by his abilities as a pleader and a jurist.

During this stage of his career, public attention was also first directed to his literary talents which he has since developed in such a remarkable degree. Newspaper writing occupied the time snatched from his profession, and his editorial contributions to several journals published at Montreal and Quebec showed that a new and formidable competitor had entered the journalistic field. A conservative in politics he threw himself with ardor into all the controversies of the time, and before long came to be recognized as one of the leaders of his party.

Twice, in 1869, and in 1872, he was selected as the party's candidate to contest the seat in the canadian House of Commons for the county of Kamouraska; but he was defeated both times by very small majorities.

This blow was generally felt and deplored by the Conservatives of Quebec, who had reason to indulge in the brightest hopes for their candidate, Mr Routhier. For ourselves, we consider that the electors of Kamouraska in withholding their confidence from this gentleman rendered unwillingly a signal service to the cause of canadian literature.

No one doubts but that Mr Routhier was made of the stuff that constitutes statesmen, and had he, like many others embarked in politics and mastered its subtleties, we might soon behold him in the ministry, it may be, Pre-

mier. But would our canadian libraries be enriched with the works of his genius — works which we are so proud to bring under the notice of strangers?

On grand occasions, when national sentiments and aspirations sought a worthy interpreter, could we count on the charming eloquence of a voice that wins every heart, and stirs every chord in the human breast? It is true we would have one more political orator capable of moving, of electrifying the masses; but we would have to deplore the loss of an orator classic and polished, whose harmonious periods ravish our senses, whose lofty strains open up profound thoughts; that scholars claim for their just inheritance. But, do we not feel that whom God has dowered with the gift of literary genius should not lose themselves in the vulgar vortex of politics? That they should keep

aloof from the surging throng, — far from the noise and clamor of popular commotion ?

In 1872, Mr Routhier was created a Queen's Counsel, and in the following year he was raised to the Bench. As a judge he is noted for his affability, painstaking character, and profound knowledge of the law, and his decisions are always marked by great clearness and soundness.

Indeed Mr Justice Routhier is a model magistrate in the fullest sense of the term, and as such, as well as for his fine social qualities, is very generally admired and esteemed throughout the Dominion of Canada. In fact, he is the wonder of the Bar for his acuteness of mind, the clearness of his arguments, and the literary and elegant style in which he expounds the grounds of his judgments. Many of his decisions are renowned.

One of the most important is that which he delivered in the cause of Her Majesty against Alexander Denistoun & all.

In that celebrated case the provincial government of Quebec did claim from the Defendants an immense area of land on the North shore of the St Lawrence, formerly known by the name of “ *Terre de Mingan* ”, and valued at twelve millions of dollars. The defendants who were the successors of the ancient seigniors of Mingan contended to be the proprietors of the north coast of the river St Lawrence from cape Cormoran to the strait of Belle-Isle, that is a length of four hundred miles. Two main questions were raised and had to be decided: 1^o Whether the defendants had any right to any part of that immense strip of land. 2^o What were the bounds of

their property, if they had any valid title. The Crown's claim was that the defendants were not the legal successors of the old seigniors of Mingan, and that even the old seigniors themselves had never had any title to that property. The record consisted of an enormous mass of ancient deeds, the first dating from 1661, maps and plans published at various dates since the time of Champlain, public and private documents, seigniorial papers, reports of explorators, voluminous dissertations of lawyers, historical works &c. Sir John Abbott and Sir Alexander Lacoste were the lawyers engaged for the defense, and M.M. Lallamme, Langlois and Amyot had appeared for the crown.

Judge Routhier decided 1^o that the defendants had a valid title to a certain extent of the property in dispute 2^o that a length of 150 miles of coast

belonged to the defendants, and that the crown was still the owner of the remainder, viz 250 miles — the division line between the two properties being the river *Aguanus* or *Goynish*.

Each party persisted to claim the 400 miles, and both of them appealed from the judgment rendered. Finally the case was brought before the Privy Council in England, and the high tribunal unanimously sustained Judge Routhier's decision which was printed and formed a volume in 4^o.

Before being called to the Bench, Mr Routhier had disclosed the talents of a born writer, the first strokes of his pen resounding like the clashing of a sword. He was specially remarkable as a polemist, and he upheld his pretensions in many controversies which created much noise and excitement in the world of letters at the time. With

his face ever to the foe, giving blow for blow, and surrounded by applauding friends and admirers, he gained a decided ascendancy over the minds of the youth. The propelling force of events carried him to the front as chief educator and party leader in his province. Had he remained in journalism he would have matured into one of the most brilliant and redoubtable of polemical writers. It is in that period of his life that he published his *Causeries du dimanche*, and that his *Portraits et Pastels Littéraires* appeared under the *nom de plume* of Jean Piquefort.

But once installed in his present position, the most honourable one open to a lawyer's ambition, he abandoned aggressive journalism. The zealous and sarcastic champion of polemics was forever merged in the upright and enlightened dignitary of the Bench. He

continued, however, to apply his mind to the cultivation of letters.

A very short acquaintance with Mr Routhier's works convinces the reader that he is a man whose attainments are not merely superficial like so many other aspirants to literary fame. He dug beneath the surface of things, made philosophy disclose the relations between cause and effect; ingratiated himself into the secrets of our complex humanity, and emitted, from deep reflection, thoughts and principles at once profound and noble, and well calculated to sustain and animate the spirit of faith and science. The fountains of his inspiration are never troubled by doubts; they ever clearly reflect the soundest orthodoxy.

In the midst of his labours, a dominating thought occupied his mind: he yearned to behold the Old Country,

with its monuments, its historical souvenirs and ruins. In 1875, he left for Europe, visited the British Isles, Belgium, France and Italy. He spent the winter in Paris where he became acquainted with the leading writers of the French Catholic press; and when in Rome the late Pontiff Pius IX conferred on him the dignity of a knight commander of the order of St Gregory the Great.

That first trip brought him many intellectual enjoyments; but his thirst for knowledge was not satiated, and he travelled again three times since all over Europe and in Algeria.

Some travellers carry home commonplace notions, and musty guide-book information. But this is not the only mischief that befalls; the real misfortune is that these heedless tourists inculcate their untravelled neighbours with their own crude notions of

what they have seen abroad. The rage to publish books of travel has become a virulent epidemic. The press groans every year under the weight of these whimsical productions — the re-hash of previous lucubrations in the same line.

Quite different from trashy works of this description are the narratives of Judge Routhier's travels. They strike you at once as masterpieces of original thought — his lively pages eschewing whatever is trite, and uninteresting. The story never drags, but is ever varied and entertaining. Anon he furnishes us with historical souvenirs enlivened by his own comments; then again we are treated to a spicy bit of word painting where the object is to place before us, in life-like colours, delineations of customs and habits. His retrospects are never tiresome or long, and always rendered no-

vel by deductions that connect his narrative with contemporaneous history. Though fond of looking back through the vistas of time, he never forgets what he owes to the present hour.

The canadian press and many important newspapers abroad have commented upon his works in the most eulogistic language. Let us quote only a few lines of praise written in the *Revue Bibliographique Universelle* (Polybion) published in Paris: “ Mr Routhier, said that review, is perhaps the most remarkable man that Canada has produced. Eminent magistrate, poet, orator, critic of literature, he possesses above all the large compass of philosophical intellect which makes men complete in the fullest sense of the word. ”

After his return from his first

trip to Europe, he delivered a course of lectures at the Laval University, which were an unqualified success. In Paris, they would have won him a foremost place as a lecturer, ranking him with such eminent men as La Pommeraye and Sarcey. His old time adversary, Mr Hector Fabre, was pleased to pay him a high compliment, in an article at once polished and encomiastic. In Quebec, he received the universal acclamations of the press as having brought the art of lecturing to its highest perfection. Ever since, every lecture meant a fresh triumph; people vied in eulogizing the delicacy and eloquence of his language, and the colouring with which he set off the sublimity of his thoughts. Buies, than whom there can no better judge from his long and varied experience of human nature, and who, at the time,

was the antipodes of Mr Routhier as regards their general views, thus writes of our author in *l'Écénement* “Routhier is an artist in the French tongue, a chaser with his pen like Benevenuto with his chisel, who charms us in prose as Musset does in verse, the highest evidence of beauty of style, which alone can secure immortality in the world of letters.”

But lecturing, restricted as it is, in its range of subjects, embarrasses the speaker by preventing him from bringing into action the full powers of his mind. The lecturer is scarcely other than a professor. Thus, any one who only heard Mr Routhier in the amphitheatre of the Laval University — of which he is a Doctor of Litterature, a Doctor in Law, and in which he is a Professor of International Law, — would form but an indifferent idea of

him in the forum. He must be seen at one of our grand national assemblies, in touch with his own ideas, and whose passions have already been stirred by powerful appeals. It is then that he assumes a new *rôle* — that he enters into the sentiments and feelings of the masses, embodying the sensations that sway them, in language unequalled for nobleness and dignity. Synthetically, he concentrates in his own poetic and eloquent nature the patriotic and religious aspirations breathed by all around him, and pours forth a lava tide of words burning with enthusiasm and figurative as few but him can make their words. On occasions of paramount national importance, the solemnity of the ceremony confers on him a representative character, and an individuality which combine all the elements that stir to their

depths the hearts of all who are Canadians and Catholics. It has been our author's lot to play this distinguished part both in Canada and Europe. We may be pardoned for feeling proud of our countryman when invited by his admirers in France and Italy to address them; for Canadians could be judged by no better criterion than he who deserves to be called a "representative man."

The discourses which he delivered at the St Jean-Baptiste celebration in 1880, placed his reputation as an orator on the highest level. It will be remembered that the celebration in question was conducted with extraordinary pomp and *éclat*. Never before did the good old city of Champlain witness within its walls such a vast concourse of French — Canadians, gathered from all the towns and villages

scattered throughout Canada and the United States. In his dual capacity of president of the Catholic Congress and vice-president of the National Convention, Judge Routhier took a leading part in the celebration, which lasted three days. Those who had the good fortune to hear both his speeches on that occasion will not forget them in a hurry ; they were master-pieces of enthusiastic eloquence, whose echoes reached even the shores of Europe. Most of the newspapers published complimentary notices. *La Minerve* styled him “ the Champion of Catholicism ; ” *L'Etendard* pronounced him “ the king of our orators, ” and *Le Courrier du Canada* wrote : “ Never before have we beheld such a scene of enthusiasm. ” These speeches will continue as models of their kind, and bracket Mr Routhier's name with those of Messrs.

Chapleau and Laurier, as a favourite orator at all national festivals.

Judge Routhier has enriched our Canadian libraries with about ten volumes of prose and one volume of poetry. That he was born a poet, all his writings, whether in prose or verse, sufficiently testify; the divine afflatus breathes through them all. He has the genuine inspiration of a poet, his ideal visions and striking imagery.

His published poems are entitled: *Les Echos*. The author gives his reasons for selecting this title in an introduction remarkable for dignity and grace: "Poetry, he writes," commonly called harmonized chant, is nothing else than the echo of songs and melodies heard by the poet, wafted to his ear from ideal worlds. Some of his lines would do honour to the best French poets, and have been very

favourably noticed by newspaper critics in France. *La Revue du Monde Catholique*, of *Paris*, having reviewed them and quoted largely from them thus comments: "It is readily seen that Mr Routhier weilds a facile pen; that his sentiments are noble and patriotic, and his inspiration truly Christian. He has added a fresh glory to his litterary crown, already so brilliant, which will not impair its lustre."

Besides being a polished scholar and occupying the first place in our little republic of letters, formerly held by the Hon: M. Chauveau, Judge Routhier has social qualities that endear him to his friends as a born champion. Those who have been happy enough to form his acquaintance esteem him highly. How charmingly he converses! His words are seasoned with attic salt, scintillate with coruscations of wit,

and overflow with gaiety of spirits. Apart from this, he is the equal of Legouvé as a reader, and soliloquizes in a way to excite the envy of professional actors.

In 1862, our subject married Miss M. C. Mondelet, only daughter of the late Jean Mondelet advocate, and niece of the two eminent Judges of the same name, who some years ago graced the bench of the Montreal district. Mrs. Routhier is one of the leaders of Quebec society, and a lady as remarkable for her social distinction as for her keen intellect. She is animated by the same lively feelings of faith as her husband — a faith that has led her to consecrate herself to works of charity. The numbers who frequent Murray-Bay as a summer resort can vouch for her piety ; for they saw a lasting monument of her zeal in the pretty chapel she has erected there.

The three daughters of Judge Routhier have inherited the brilliant qualities of their parents. One excels at the easel; another by means of the piano interprets music to perfection; whilst it is at the option of the third to become famous in letters. They are all three noted for their sweetness and amiability.

Our learned Magistrate has also a son endowed with rare qualities for the fine arts. His father wished him to study the law; but he preferred a more adventurous life, and he is now proprietor of a flourishing ranche in the North West Territories, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

It was at Murray-Bay that Judge Routhier made his first step in the magistracy. It is also in that enchanting spot that he passes the summer months in the midst of his family who cheer and comfort him.

His white villa stands out in bold relief from the clustering foliage of the green trees. From the verandah, where, in the open air, under a sky whose smiles are seldom clouded, he drinks in the health giving breezes, his gaze rests with tranquil bliss on the ravishing panorama spread out before him. The truncated cones of the Laurentian Mountains rise boldly defined against the azure sky, and then descend by steep proclivities to the river below, forming a succession of promontories that excite the tourist's wonder. In front, the river St Lawrence is seen to line the boundless horizon, infinite as the ocean. On the right, in a sort of twilight, loom up the hills that spread along the southern shore of the stream, often veiled by mists, and sometimes, by the curious effect of a mirage, brought within

full view of La Malbaie. The foreground of this picture is occupied by the expanding sea. Here the poet's soul goes out to Nature, and here, no doubt, to the pleasing sound of the surging surf, were composed the most harmonious of his numbers.



